



SUCCESS STORY

Brokering Land Issues More Peacefully

Water user associations become a respected tool for resolving conflicts



Photo: Winrock Int'l

Representatives of the village of Shaidan's rural council and the local water user association council discuss land distribution issues in Kyrgyzstan's Jalalabat Province.

"I didn't believe that a water user association would take care of my problem that has lasted for years. However, thanks to the association, my conflict with neighboring farmers has been resolved," said farmer Salijan Saidinov.

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Farmer Salijan Saibidinov owns land alongside an irrigation canal in Jalalabat Province's Shaidan Village in Kyrgyzstan. Each spring, soon after the growing season began, Salijan's neighbors would throw trash onto his field while cleaning debris from the canal. His land also would flood when his neighbors overwatered their fields. Pollution and flooding were affecting farmers' crop yields. In turn, Salijan reduced the amount of water flowing from the canal, thus causing resentment among his neighbors.

Despite numerous complaints by Salijan and other farmers, local authorities did not provide any solution to the issue. In a desperate attempt to resolve endless conflicts, a group of farmers, including Salijan, approached their local water user association for help.

With 500 members, the Shaidan-Kara-Ungur water user association is one of many in Kyrgyzstan created with USAID assistance. The program teaches participant farmers to manage their water resources, distribute irrigation water to various stakeholders in a transparent and fair manner, and resolve conflicts related to water systems and land rights.

The association's newly elected council and conflict resolution commission persuaded the village rural council to move some of Salijan's land away from the canal, thus providing more space for the canal clean-up work without encroaching on the farmer's fields. The village council agreed and, because the land adjacent to Salijan's lot belonged to the state-owned Land Reallocation Fund, deciding to swap some of Salijan's land closest to the canal with the same amount of land belonging to the fund on the other side of his lot.

Now Salijan does not have to worry about flooding or debris polluting and destroying his crops, and he is able to achieve higher yields from his land. With more space for cleaning canals debris, clean-up efforts no longer cause tension among neighboring farmers.